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ABSTRACT

The author introduces the concept of "inferring value teacher behavior." This behavior is essentially a value statement formulated by the teacher about a student's value. It contains the three characteristics of value statements (states the characteristics, identifies it as a value, identifies a value referent) but, in addition, the teacher phrases the statement in a tentative way and expressly invites the student to respond to the teacher's inference. Processes for formulating the inferring value teacher behavior are described in general, in cases when the student voluntarily provides a rationale for his value statement, when no rationale is offered, and when the rationale is a personal reaction rather than a characteristic. Techniques for broadening student-offered referents, for translating characteristics, and for dealing with negative rationales are provided. (MJB)

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# THE INFERRING VALUE TEACHING BEHAVIOR

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TSC 0577-03

# THE INFERRING VALUE TEACHING BEHAVIOR

*When a teacher uses the Inferring Value teaching behavior, the teacher makes it possible for students to communicate something of who they are; of what is important to them.*

## INFERRING VALUE

Have you ever walked away from a conversation with someone you've just met and thought, *What a neat person. She's really interesting.* On the other hand, you may have walked away and thought, *I'm sure glad I don't work with that person.* The chances are that you reached that judgment based on your subconscious inference about that person's values. In the first case, you had positive feelings about the person probably because there was a match between your own values and the values you subconsciously inferred. In the latter case, there was probably a mismatch. We frequently draw inferences about the values of others. To do so is normal, natural and part of human interaction. However, one of the shortcomings of this process is that we may misread the values of others, and, consequently, misjudge them as people.

In our view, there are two reasons why this happens. First, we assume our "readings" of the values of others are correct without checking to see if those values are indeed values they hold about the subject under discussion. A second reason we may misjudge people is that we seldom have adequate information as a base to infer their values. Should we rely solely on intuition, or add to that a process by which we can more accurately go about building and testing this inference? Which is a more humane way to "read" the values of others?

Certainly, how we infer values is significant primarily in terms of how well we want to come to know others and how well they want us to come to know them. In the classroom, however, the use of a deliberate process to infer the values of students in a way that involves them in that process is critical.

## A DESCRIPTION OF THE INFERRING VALUE TEACHING BEHAVIOR

The Inferring Value teaching behavior is essentially a value statement formulated by the teacher about the student's value. A value statement: (1) specifies the important characteristic, (2) labels the important characteristic as a value, and (3) identifies the referent for that value. However, what makes an Inferring Value teaching behavior more than a value statement alone is that the teacher phrases it in a tentative way and expressly invites the student to respond to the teacher's inference.

> *T: Rosanna, am I correct in saying that one of your values about daily exercise is that it gives you vitality?*

In the foregoing example, the teacher specified the important characteristic, *vitality,* labeled it as a value, *one of your values,* identified the referent of the value, *exercise,* phrased it in a tentative way, . . . *am I correct in saying* . . . , and expressly invited the student to respond through the use of a question.

## A PROCESS FOR FORMULATING THE INFERRING VALUE TEACHING BEHAVIOR

In considering the description and example of an Inferring Value teaching behavior, it's apparent that the formulation of this teaching behavior is more involved than any of the other VATS teaching behaviors. By listening carefully and thoughtfully to a student's proposed course of action or value judgment and rationale, the teacher ascertains the important characteristic and the referent for that characteristic. With that information, the formulation of the teaching behavior is possible. Add the label, *value,* phrase the value statement in a tentative way, and invite the student to respond. However, if the student reports a course of action or a value judgment and does not include a rationale, it is usually impossible to determine all of the components of a value statement. The teacher will need to take action to elicit the student's rationale. A Probe for Rationale teaching behavior is called for.

Because inferences about the values of others are tentative at best, it is incumbent on the teacher to invite the student to respond to the Inferring Value teaching behavior. In order to communicate the tentative nature of this teaching behavior and to invite the student to respond, phrases such as those that follow are frequently used as part of this teaching behavior.

- *It sounds as though . . . Is that it?*
- *Would it be fair to say that . . . ?*
- *I kind of hear you saying . . . ? Is that what you're saying?*
- *I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it sounds like you're saying that . . . Is that right?*
- *Would it be accurate to say . . . ?*
- *I'm getting the message that one of your values about . . . ? Is that right?*

If the student disagrees with the Inferring Value teaching behavior, the teacher may reformulate the teaching behavior as appropriate. However, to avoid a teacher-dominated dialogue, this teaching behavior shouldn't usually be reformulated more than once. On the other hand, the teacher may use an Acknowledging teaching behavior in response to the student and try again at some later time.

When the teacher has not been successful in inferring the student's value to the student's satisfaction, there are, none-the-less, at least two positive outcomes. First, the student feels the personal interest of the teacher because of the nature of the interaction itself. Second, it stimulates the student to continue thinking about what the student's values are.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE INFERRING VALUE TEACHING BEHAVIOR
WHEN THE STUDENT VOLUNTARILY PROVIDES A RATIONALE

FS: How do you feel about school this year?

S: *I really like school this year because you get to pick some of the classes you take.* (RVJ)

The characteristic: *pick some classes*

The referent: *school this year*

T: *Altha, is it fair to say that one of your values about school is the opportunity to pick some classes for yourself?* (Inferring Value teaching behavior)

S: *Yea, that's right* (IVY)

T: *OK* (A)

AN EXAMPLE OF THE INFERRING VALUE TEACHING BEHAVIOR
WHEN THE STUDENT DOESN'T VOLUNTARILY INCLUDE A RATIONALE

FS: How do you feel about school this year?

S: *I really like it.* (RVJ)

T: *Would you be willing to share why you feel that way, Maynard?* (Probe for Rationale)

S: *Well, this year I get a chance to talk in class and to hear what other kids have to say.* (PRY)

The characteristic: *chance to talk and hear what others have to say.* This may be translated to: *chance to share ideas.*

The referent: *school this year.*

T: *Maynard, it seems as though the chance to share ideas is one of your values about school. Is that it?* (Inferring Value teaching behavior)

S: *What other people have to say is really important.* (IVY)

T: *OK* (A)

SOME RATIONALES AREN'T RATIONALES

A student's rationale for a course of action or value judgment is critical in formulating an Inferring Value teaching behavior. In some instances students think they've reported a rationale, but they haven't.

FS: How do you feel about school this year?

S: *I really like it.* (RVJ)

T: *Would you be willing to share why you feel that way, Maynard?*
(Probe for Rationale)

S: *Because it's fun.* (PRN)

The student responded to the Probe for Rationale by reporting a personal reaction to school, *fun* (Reporting a Value Judgement), rather than by citing a characteristic(s) about school that lead to the judgment, *fun.* The teacher, therefore, uses a more direct Probe for Rationale teaching behavior in an attempt to surface the specific characteristic(s) Maynard used as the basis for his judgment.

T: *What is there about school that makes you say it's fun?*
(Probe for Rationale)

S: *Well, this year I get a chance to talk in class and to hear what other kids have to say.* (PRY)

Because the teacher used a more direct Probe for Rationale teaching behavior, the student was able to cite a characteristic Maynard felt was important about school and the teacher was able to formulate an Inferring Value teaching behavior.

T: *It sounds like getting a chance to share ideas is one of your values about school. Did I understand you correctly?* (Inferring Value teaching behavior)

S: *Uh-huh.* (IVY) (A)

In this example the student used *fun* as a judgment word in response to a Probe for Rationale. Other such judgment words that may be used in response to a Probe for Rationale are, *good, nice, wonderful, terrific,* and so on. If after using a more direct Probe for Rationale teaching

behavior in response to one of these judgment words, the student still responds with a personal reaction rather than a characteristic, the teacher should respond with an Acknowledging teaching behavior. Seldom should more than two Probe for Rationale teaching behaviors be used in one interaction with a student.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

### Broadening the Referent

In formulating the Inferring Value teaching behavior, the teacher may broaden the referent of the characteristic expressed by the student to a more general category. For example, with a student's referent expressed as *school this year,* the teacher may broaden it to *school. Fred's bicycle* may be broadened to *bicycles. Volkswagen* may be broadened to *compact cars* or *economy cars.* In broadening the referent, the teacher is actually inviting the student to consider whether the characteristic surfaced about the referent is also applicable to a broader referent. Care should be exercised in broadening the referent, however, so as not to broaden it too far beyond what the student can tract. For example, broadening the referent *Volkswagen* to *vehicular modes of transportation* may lose the student.

### Translating Characteristics

In some instances, when the student has used a lengthy or convoluted phrase to express a characteristic, the teacher may find it useful to transform that phrase into more concise language. For example, *chance to talk in class and to hear what others say,* may be changed to, *chance for students to share ideas.* Care should be exercised in transforming the student's expressed characteristic, however, to assure the shift makes sense to the student and accurately reflects what the student has said instead of putting words in the student's mouth.

Dealing with Negative Rationales

On occasion, when students state a value judgment or course of action, the rationale they report may center on characteristics they dislike. In these instances, the teacher may use a Probe for Rationale teaching behavior phrased in a way which invites the students to consider what they *do* like. If the teacher doesn't get a positive rationale, the Inferring Value teaching behavior shouldn't be used. On the other hand, there are those instances in which the teacher may be able to infer characteristics students like from their stated disliked. On those occasions, the Inferring Value teaching behavior may be used. For example:

S: *I really don't like the little Honda cars because you're too cramped when you get inside.*

The teacher infers the characteristic the student likes about cars as *adequate room.*

T: *Then, it seems to me adequate room is one of your values about cars. Is that right, Sakamoto?*